

The Successful SUPERVISOR

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Tips from  LifeSolutions

In this second and final part of The Successful Supervisor series on generational differences, we will focus on key strategies for managing a multi-generational workforce, with emphasis on the Millennials. As we learned in the previous edition of this newsletter (August 2011), each generation is a product of its times and brings both strengths and challenges to the workplace. The manager/supervisor's task is to embrace the different perspectives and ideas of each generation so that the challenges can become strengths and lead to more creativity and productivity. As always, we are interested in your feedback and/or questions. Please e-mail your questions and comments to EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.

The good news is that the tried-and-true managerial skills that you are already practicing will serve you well in managing a multi-generational workplace. These skills address the many similarities in the needs and wants of all generations in the workplace. Things like:

- ◆ Getting to know your employees as individuals, which helps you to see if they really fit the profile of their generation, but more important, helps them feel valued
- ◆ Creating a climate of respect and compassion, which is the way to bring out the best in employees from each generation
- ◆ Modeling good communication skills, with an emphasis on listening, which is necessary in promoting teamwork
- ◆ Being a person of integrity – walking the talk – which fosters trust

In addition, a manager's success will depend on the ability to reach out in ways that are appropriate for each group. Managers would do well to practice what Claire Raines, in her book, *Connecting Generations*, calls the **Titanium Rule – Do unto others, keeping their preferences in mind**. (This is very similar to the Center for Inclusion's Platinum Rule – *Treat others the way they want to be treated*.) Here are some ways for managers to use the *Titanium Rule* to connect with and engage each generation:

Millennials

- ◆ Use a variety of communication methods – texting and instant messaging as well as in-person meetings. This is the most “wired” generation, but they like to connect person to person too.
- ◆ Ask for their input, and not just about technology. Respect their ideas even though they lack experience.
- ◆ Provide clear direction and structure (remember they are used to “helicopter parents”) with lots of positive and instructional feedback. (And tell them why – e.g., “We don't wear flip flops to work because we don't want foot injuries.”)
- ◆ Don't squelch their enthusiasm. See it as refreshing to have a touch of optimism and fun in the workplace (and other generations will follow your lead).
- ◆ Don't micromanage. They may have different ways of working that are a bit unconventional, so focus on what produces results.

Gen Xers

- ◆ Give them a job and let them run with it. Their independence appreciates direction but not hovering.
- ◆ Support opportunities to grow and develop. Gen Xers want to build skills and resumes (and this could mean good turnover, if they are promoted within your company).
- ◆ Offer flexibility, especially with work schedules, to respect their need for work-life balance. (This is important to Millennials too!)
- ◆ Don't have long meetings that focus on process and not results. The Gen Xer's motto could be: “Just tell me if it's gonna be on the test.”

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- ◆ Don't schmooze, beat around the bush, or corporate-speak. They are the “get real” generation.

Baby Boomers

- ◆ Chat with them over coffee. Ask about their family – that new grandchild or son/daughter in college. Relationships matter.
- ◆ Assure them their input is valued and they are making a difference in the workplace.
- ◆ Offer flexibility – for managing family issues or their own health and wellness. Baby Boomers are recognizing there is something to this work-life balance thing!
- ◆ Don't discount them by not being open to their input. They want to be team players.
- ◆ Don't practice “one-upmanship” or send “my way or the highway” messages.

Traditionalists

- ◆ Honor the history they bring to the department. Value their experience by facilitating their mentoring of the Millennials.
- ◆ Make an effort to have face-to-face communication, not just e-mail, with the Traditionalist.
- ◆ Don't assume they are just putting in their time until they retire. Most are engaged in their work and want to contribute their knowledge and insights.
- ◆ Don't write them off as not being able to learn technology. However, training needs to be done respectfully and in a low-stress environment.

Source: Raines, Claire. *Connecting Generations The Sourcebook for a New Workplace*, 2003.

LifeSolutions consultants are always available to answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact us at 1.800.647.3327.

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